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One of the twenty-first century's great challenges will be to fill Asia's security vacuum. The region lacks a framework for regulating great-power relations. The United States maintains a heavy military presence and an important set of bilateral security arrangements, and the region's great powers cooperate on an *ad hoc* basis. But there is no developed security system embraced by Asia Pacific's leading powers. Meanwhile, the 'Asian way' of consensus-based diplomacy has suffered greatly – in coherence and prestige – from the financial crisis which started in 1997.

Since the mid-1990s, much of the multilateral security dialogue and cooperation in the Asia Pacific region has been centred on the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum (ARF) established in 1994. A notable feature of the ARF is the 'leadership role' of ASEAN, a sub-regional coalition of politically weak states which lack strategic autonomy. While ASEAN has promised to take into consideration the concerns and interests of the great powers, it has claimed for itself the 'driver's seat' in organising and managing the ARF process. The ARF is supposed to generate a constructive and predictable pattern of relations among the Asia-Pacific nations, including the great powers. But even the most optimistic assessments of the ARF acknowledge the importance of relations between the major powers in shaping regional order. Moreover, if the ARF fails to overcome the substantial scepticism that already exists about its future, then regional stability may come to depend critically on the prospects for some form of more organised concert among the major powers of the region.

Japan has been an eager promoter of such a concert. On the eve of the visit by Russian President Boris Yeltsin to Tokyo in April 1998, then Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto discussed a proposal put forward by his government calling for the region's four major powers – the US, China, Japan, and Russia – to hold summit-level talks on security issues.¹ There was already a pattern of unusually frequent bilateral summits between these powers at around this time: Hashimoto's visit to China in September 1997; Chinese

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President Jiang Zemin's trip to the US in October 1997; Yeltsin's visit to China in November 1997; the Japan–Russia summit in Krasnoyarsk in November 1997, Yeltsin's visit to Tokyo in April 1998; and US President Bill Clinton's visit to China in June 1998. Furthermore, on the heels of this last event, Japan announced the launch of second-track-level security talks with the US and China, which it hoped would lay the foundation of a 'triangular' security relationship. The timing of this announcement clearly reflected Tokyo's apprehensions that a closer Sino-US relationship might be developing at its expense.²

The idea of concert

The idea of a concert of powers derives from the nineteenth-century European arrangement between Austria, Prussia, Britain and Russia (and, later, Bourbon France).³ This represented an attempt by these victorious great powers, following their defeat of Napoleon, to assume the primary responsibility for managing Europe's security problems. The system worked well between 1815 and 1823, but experienced a steady decline thereafter. Eventually it collapsed with the Crimean War of 1854. The European concert operated on the basis of four principles:

- a reliance on multilateral consultations among the great powers – that is to say, conference diplomacy – to manage crisis situations;
- an agreement that there could be no territorial change without great-power approval;
- a commitment to protect all 'essential' members of the states system; and
- a recognition that all the great powers must have equal status and that none should be humiliated.⁴

While not requiring perfect harmony among the great powers, concert diplomacy nonetheless depended on a degree of self-restraint.⁵ Although the concert marked a new approach to European security, it was in reality a more cooperative version of a balance-of-power system. As Benjamin Miller points out, it represented the middle ground between the more idealistic notions of collective security and the extreme forms of balance of power:

A concert of great powers ... coordinates the maintenance of balance of power and jointly manages inter-state conflicts. A concert might even go beyond management and attempts to settle major disputes both among the great powers themselves and among third parties, especially those conflicts that could bring about involvement of the great powers. In this sense, a concert is more ambitious than the balance of power. The latter does not attempt to address the underlying issues in dispute, but only to deter, and to manage the balance of forces in such a way that there will be powerful disincentives for the use of force.⁶

Most countries of the Asia Pacific would regard a framework for regulating great-power competition as a necessary element of regional order. But there are obvious problems in applying the classical concert model to Asia. First, if the

European concert is any guide, concerts do not come about in peacetime. Rather, they emerge in the aftermath of a major-power war in which an aspiring hegemonic power has been defeated by a rival coalition of great powers. John Mearsheimer lists several reasons why great-power war may be a necessary backdrop to the emergence of concerts: because the great powers have nothing more to gain by attacking each other; because the status quo is already advantageous to the victorious powers; because of war-weariness among the great powers; and because the cooperation which developed among the victorious great powers in defeating the potential hegemon tends to carry over into post-war years.⁷ But there has been no great-power war in Asia which could provide the basis for a concert.

The second problem is that, in reality, the European concert imposed a sort of 'great power tutelage over the rest of Europe'.⁸ In today's world, this would be unacceptable. The Asia Pacific region's weaker states, particularly the members of ASEAN, would oppose such dominance. ASEAN's fear of any multilateral arrangement in which the great powers play a dominant role has led it to claim the 'driver's seat' in the ARF.⁹ Singapore's Foreign Minister Wong Kan Seng stated in July 1993 that what ASEAN hopes to develop is a 'relationship among equals – a true partnership'.¹⁰ A concert system which legitimises great-power domination is not acceptable to ASEAN. While ASEAN's opposition will not necessarily prevent the emergence of such a system, it will raise the political costs of developing it for the great powers who also compete among themselves for ASEAN's support for their regional security and economic interests.

The third problem, as Patrick Morgan points out, is that the emergence of the European concert was 'negatively motivated by a fear of war and revolution', rather than by a positive affinity to a set of shared political values by the major powers.¹¹ In the Asia Pacific today, a shared interest in economic prosperity – and hence in the avoidance of war, which would undermine prosperity – may serve as the basis of a concert. But can a concert work on the basis of a limited degree of shared interests in the absence of shared values? The eventual demise of the European concert was due in part to differences between those who defined its goals narrowly as the maintenance of territorial stability and those who sought to use it to alter domestic political systems.¹² Arguably, US goals in the Asia Pacific are now more expansive than those of China: Beijing considers the American concern with democratic enlargement to be an ideological threat. Richard Rosecrance argues that a modern concert requires not just participation by all major powers and renunciation of war and territorial expansion, but also ideological agreement, including an agreement on 'giving liberal democracy and economic development first priority'.¹³ But accepting liberal democracy as the foundation of regional order will automatically exclude China from a concert system. The unavoidable conclusion: for an Asia Pacific concert to work, economic development has to be accepted as the primary element of an ideological consensus, ahead of liberal democracy. Such an understanding will not be easily attainable.

A fourth difficulty is that the coordinated power balancing that takes place within a concert can only be sustained as long as it does not violate great-power interest.¹⁴ The persistence of serious territorial disputes in the Asia Pacific region reduces the likelihood of engagement through a concert framework. Such disputes, like the one between Japan and Russia over the Kurile Islands, have prevented meaningful economic cooperation among the great powers. They can provoke nationalist hysteria, as evident in the case of the Sino-Japanese dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, and they can develop into military flashpoints.

Finally, the basic question of who qualifies for great-power status and who can legitimately and meaningfully belong to a concert remains problematic. While Japan's foreign ministry suggested the US, Japan, China and Russia, Singapore's former Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, has argued that the stability of the Asia Pacific region 'still boils down to the relationship among the United States, Japan, and China'.¹⁵ Nor does China see Russia as a major player in regional security so long as it remains inwardly focused and constrained by political and economic crises. China's leaders and strategic thinkers are known to envisage an even more select group – China and the US – as the guardians of regional order.¹⁶ With its decision to go nuclear, India, too, is staking its claim to take part in to any great-power security regime, a claim which would be difficult for the others to resist as India weathers Western opposition to its nuclear status (as indicated in the partial lifting of US sanctions against India and Pakistan, and the US attempts to develop a dialogue with India over nuclear issues). It seems clear that the notion of concert in the Asia Pacific cannot be meaningful except on the basis of a flexible and adjustable membership.

These are all serious obstacles, yet even if a concert system seems improbable in the current Asian political climate, the idea of great-power leadership in managing Asia-Pacific security problems continues to have some resonance among the region's policy-makers. Concert-based approaches predate the emergence of multilateral security institutions and dialogues. In the 1980s, then Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev proposed talks on regional security issues between the US, the Soviet Union, Japan, China and India.¹⁷ His proposal fell on deaf ears, however, due to Cold War suspicions that marked relations between the major powers. Another example of great-power primacy in regional security affairs was the role played by the Permanent Five (P-5) members of the UN Security Council in finding a settlement to the Cambodia conflict during its final years. Until then, the Cambodia peace process had been effectively led by ASEAN. While sections within ASEAN resented the role of the P-5 as diminishing ASEAN's own role, ASEAN conceded the need for P-5 involvement in securing the end to the Cambodia conflict, while the P-5 consistently acknowledged ASEAN's vital contribution to the peace process.

Concert and cooperation

In the early 1990s, 'cooperative security' emerged as the main principle for organising multilateral security dialogues and cooperation among the Asia

Pacific countries. This principle called for the avoidance of an explicit balance-of-power framework, including the rejection of 'deterrence mind-sets' associated with great-power geopolitics of the Cold War era. The notion of cooperative security emphasised 'inclusiveness' and the equality of all the states. The institutional expression of cooperative security was ARF, which was to be based on the ASEAN model of consultations and consensus-building. But, for the first time, a regional organisation including all the major powers of the international system (the US, China, Russia, India, the EU and Japan) would be 'led' by a group of its weaker members (that is, ASEAN).¹⁸ The ARF concept thus turned the idea of concert on its head.

The viability of this approach, however, has been suspect from the start. Certainly, ASEAN's leadership of the ARF offered important advantages: without ASEAN sponsorship, Chinese participation in a regional multilateral security grouping would have been highly unlikely. ASEAN's own norms and institutional style provided a ready-made foundation upon which the ARF could build itself. But keeping the ARF tied to the ASEAN framework also limits its relevance to security problems in North-east Asia. Moreover, the 'ASEAN way' of slowly and informally moving towards a multilateral arrangement tests the patience of ARF's Western members.

Since its inception in July 1995, the ARF has adopted a multi-tier approach to security cooperation, consisting of confidence-building, preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution. The confidence-building measures (CBMs) adopted during its first five years have consisted largely of information sharing on a voluntary basis, and of meetings among regional defence officials. The idea of a regional arms register has been abandoned – instead, members are encouraged to participate in the UN Conventional Arms Register. More ambitious CBMs, such as advanced notification of military exercises, have been stymied. Not surprisingly, the US rejected Chinese proposals in 1997 for advance notification of joint military exercises conducted by countries outside their home territory: this would obviously affect the US, the country which conducts most such exercises, while sparing China. For its part, China has vehemently opposed any role which the ARF may assume in preventive diplomacy on the grounds that it may lead to outside interference in its 'domestic' affairs (by which it means, in particular, Taiwan). China rejects ARF participation in conflict mediation and resolution. It prefers to keep the ARF primarily as a vehicle for dialogue and consultations, rather than as a tool for binding security agreements or constraining measures. Thus, the advancement of the ARF's security agenda remains hostage to continuing Sino-US differences, among other factors.

Moreover, the Asian economic crisis and its attendant political effects have further undermined ASEAN's ability to provide leadership for regional security issues. ASEAN members not only have to focus on their domestic economic and political problems, but the organisation as a whole must also cope with the burdens imposed by an expanded membership. Economic disparities between the old and new members, the international condemnation

of its decision to grant membership to Myanmar in July 1997, the attendant pressure to show results of its 'constructive engagement' approach to Myanmar, and the political instability in Cambodia, are all issues that seriously test ASEAN's capacity to manage regional order in South-east Asia. Multilateral approaches in the Asia Pacific, including the APEC framework, have proved to be of little use to ASEAN in dealing with the economic crisis. The Asian economic crisis is also creating new security challenges for ASEAN members, including tensions over illegal cross-border migration, and political strains in Singapore-Indonesia and Singapore-Malaysia relations. Thus, the credibility of regional multilateral institutions in dealing with the region's problems is at a low point.

The multilateral 'cooperative security' approach underlying the ARF is also being challenged by the recent resurgence of some of the region's traditional alliance mechanisms. The most important development is the reaffirmation of the US-Japan defence treaty which provides coverage for US forces in the region, and which is believed by many to cover regional crises in the Taiwan Straits and the South China Sea.¹⁹ US-Australia defence relations, especially joint exercises and training activities, have been strengthened under Prime Minister John Howard's government, with Canberra reasserting its traditional preference for a forward defence strategy over the 'defence-in-depth' concept favoured in the late 1980s and early 1990s. ASEAN members, especially Singapore and the Philippines, have themselves strengthened their individual defence links with the US, despite a professed commitment to self-reliance in defence and multilateral security frameworks.

Concert and bilateral relations

The limitations of the ARF do not themselves mean that a concert of great powers would provide a more effective way to manage the region's security dilemmas. But they do invite attention to developments in great-power relations which have moved parallel to the Forum and which might have opened up new avenues for ensuring Asia Pacific regional security.

Great-power interactions in the Asia Pacific are predominantly bilateral in nature. A concert system, even one that is geared primarily to the management of the great-power balance itself, need not be multilateral in any formal sense. It could consist of a series of overlapping and cross-cutting bilateral relationships which are non-exclusionary and not directed against any member of the great-power system. A concert need not be a formal, institutional arrangement; the European concert functioned without much institutionalisation.²⁰ Nor does concert require very harmonious relationships between the major powers. The European concert was 'a mixed bag of competition and collaboration'. It permitted the great powers to cooperate in preserving the balance of power and to manage international disputes jointly. While the concert did not lead them to renounce their individual interests, it did produce a more moderate form of great-power rivalry than would normally be the case with a balance-of-power system.²¹

US–China

Recent trends in great-power relationships, especially Sino-US relations, suggest precisely these sorts of possibilities. Take for example the notion of a Sino-US 'strategic partnership' (called 'constructive strategic partnership' by the Chinese) which emerged during Jiang Zemin's 1997 visit to the US. Like a similarly vague term used to describe the Sino-Russian relationship, the Sino-US strategic partnership was a call not for an alliance but for a security regime based on the principle of mutual restraint. It represented an effort to develop a more stable relationship, induced partly by the 1996 Taiwan Straits crisis and by growing economic ties which have seen US investments in China surpassing its investments in Japan.²²

The pursuit of a strategic partnership with the world's only superpower was in part a reflection of China's quest for enhanced international status, consistent with the principles of concert diplomacy. But 'equal status' is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of a concert system. Ideological differences over human rights and normative conflicts over the principle of non-interference have remained a powerful barrier to Sino-US cooperation. China has not stopped viewing US calls for human rights and democracy as an attempt to overthrow the communist regime through 'peaceful evolution'. China's firm rejection of the idea that the international community has a 'right' to intervene to protect human rights underpinned its fierce opposition to NATO intervention in Kosovo, and attests to the severity of its ideological differences with the US. China argues that such intervention violates the doctrine of non-interference in the internal affairs of states; if accepted, will legitimise Western support for an independent Taiwan. A similar clash of perspectives over the Taiwan question explains China's loud protests against US plans to deploy a Theatre Missile Defence (TMD) system in North-east Asia, which China believes will eventually cover Taiwan.

The US and China also differ on territorial issues. Washington officially does not take sides in the territorial disputes in the South China Sea, although it has made clear its intent to resist any attempts to block the sea lanes that pass through, or are in the vicinity of, the disputed area. Despite Manila's attempt to portray the recent Visiting Forces Agreement with the US as an anti-China measure, the extent of the US commitment to the Philippines in the event of a confrontation with China has been left deliberately ambiguous by Washington.

Avoiding perceptions of humiliation is another key requirement of a concert relationship which has not been fully satisfied in the case of the Sino-US partnership. This situation was most vividly shown in China's bellicose response to the bombing of its embassy in Belgrade by NATO forces in April 1999. The embassy bombing was hardly a threat to China's national security in the conventional sense. Yet, it sparked rabid anti-US sentiments in China, encouraged by the government. The idea of 'strategic partnership' was dealt a severe blow as a result of Beijing's retaliatory moves which included denying permission for US ship visits to Hong Kong, and suspending military exchanges and trade talks with the US (leading US Secretary of Defense William Cohen to postpone his trip to China). The crisis reinforced the worst

fears that each side feels about the other; in China, the image of the US as a hegemonic bully was matched in the US by the perception of China as the major threat to its national security. US fears had already been aroused by the coincidental row over US charges of Chinese espionage at American weapons laboratories. China's threat to stop cooperating with the US in controlling WMD indicated that bilateral tensions could undermine their interest in jointly managing wider regional and global issues.

The embassy bombing did, however, also reveal a more stable core of Sino-US relations. President Bill Clinton's administration, despite heavy pressure from Congress, reaffirmed its policy of 'engagement' and pushed for the renewal of trade concessions to China. China, after rejecting US explanations of the bombing, nonetheless continued to acknowledge the importance of bilateral ties, avoiding a complete breakdown. Future Sino-US relations will, perhaps, be based on a greater sense of realism, avoiding false euphoria, acknowledging elements of both competition and common interest.

In theory, the principle of 'equal status' integral to concert diplomacy could prove useful in developing a more constructive Sino-US relationship. Certainly the US and China have important ideological differences. But, unlike the US-Soviet clash of the Cold War, a shared commitment to capitalist economic development already exists and it could serve as the basis for pursuing common security interests. A regional order could be built around the understanding that China and other countries could remain capitalist without necessarily being democratic, rather than having to accept capitalism with democracy, as demanded by the US.

China-Japan

Sino-Japanese relations during the 1990s have suffered a number of setbacks, including especially Japanese alarm about Chinese missile firings in the Taiwan Straits. Chinese protests over the construction of a lighthouse in the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands by a Japanese political group in 1996 highlighted the potential of territorial disputes to disrupt bilateral ties. Similarly, China's opposition to the visit by Hashimoto to Tokyo's war-memorial Yasukuni Shrine in July 1996 (the first such visit by a Japanese Prime Minister in 11 years) attested to the continuing impact of the memory of Japanese aggression in the Second World War, and China's deep distrust of Japan over its refusal to apologise adequately, as China sees it, for the War. These problems are compounded by China's well-publicised suspicion that the revised Japan-US 'Defence Guidelines' of September 1997 – by paving the way for a reorientation of their alliance to cover wider regional security threats – amount to an attempt at containment of China. Ironically, however, Tokyo has tended to believe that Beijing gives higher priority to its relations with the US than with Japan, evidenced by the fact that most Chinese criticism of the Japan-US Defence Guidelines has been aimed at Japan.

At the same time there have been efforts to improve the Sino-Japan relationship. Both countries agreed at a November 1996 summit, held in the shadow of APEC's summit in the Philippines, that their leaders should make

reciprocal visits to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the normalisation of Japan–China relations. In September 1997, during Hashimoto's visit to China, the two sides agreed that an annual summit should be held alternately in China and Japan. Efforts at confidence building between the two militaries have continued, although they have not yet led to significant results.

Russia–China

In the early 1990s, large-scale sales of Russian defence equipment to Beijing constituted the key element of Sino-Russian bilateral ties. But the idea of a 'strategic partnership' which surfaced in 1996 was in essence driven by such considerations as Russia's alarm over the expansion of NATO, and Chinese fears about the strengthening of the US–Japan defence arrangements. The Moscow–Beijing link was reinforced by joint fury at NATO's war against Yugoslavia. Cooperation between China and Russia is constrained, however, by age-old suspicions, as well as by the fact that both depend on the US and Japan for economic development. There has been substantial progress on border issues, especially with the 1996 signing of the Shanghai Agreement on Confidence-Building Measures, and the 1997 accord on the reduction of troops in border areas. These agreements effectively permit China to redeploy its military resources to maritime conflict arenas, and are therefore a key factor in the balance of power in the Pacific. Few believe that the Sino-Russian 'strategic partnership' will blossom into a true security community based on mutual trust and long-term avoidance of strategic competition. In the meantime, though, it represents a major step towards managing their bilateral disputes, while helping China to balance the US in East Asia and Russia to counter the geopolitical pressures of NATO expansion.²³

Russia–Japan

There has been a marked improvement in Russia–Japan relations, especially in the political and military sphere. In 1996, the Hashimoto government announced a new policy towards Russia based on three principles of trust, mutual benefit and an 'emphasis on the long-term perspective'.²⁴ At the Japan–Russia Summit in Krasnoyarsk on 1–2 November 1997, the two sides developed a plan for economic cooperation, including peaceful use of nuclear power, and agreed to high level military exchanges – including visits by the defence chiefs of the two countries – and the conduct of joint exercises to coordinate humanitarian operations. Russia agreed to stop targeting its nuclear missiles at Japan. But the Kuriles issue remained the major obstacle to better ties. During the summit, Japan was believed to have offered a compromise plan under which Moscow would concede sovereignty over the territories while continuing to administer them, and the two sides would share the resources, mainly fisheries, around the islands.²⁵ At their November 1998 Moscow summit, Yeltsin and Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi pledged to resolve differences over the Kuriles by end of 1999. But Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov indicated that his country would not sign a treaty which required it to

cede the islands entirely. Japan hopes that a peace treaty can be signed after a Kuriles settlement. To induce Moscow further, at the 1998 summit Japan granted nearly \$1bn dollars to help Russia weather its economic crisis and to develop the Kuriles. It also agreed to set up a committee to demarcate the boundary and establish a body to initiate economic cooperation over the islands. While overall security relations continue to improve and the two sides have already started joint naval training exercises, obstacles to a Kuriles settlement remain, chief among them being the question of whether the politically weak Yeltsin can overcome opposition from Russian nationalists in the *Duma*.

In short, trends in the relations between the four powers demonstrate a tendency to focus on the overall relationship, and to reduce its vulnerability to specific disputes or issues of contention. (The sharp deterioration of Sino-US ties in 1999 complicates but does not, in itself, stop the overall trend.)* Second, the emphasis is on confidence building and dialogue; this remains the essence of the so-called 'strategic partnerships' in Sino-US and Sino-Russian relations. In a related vein, many of the initiatives for strengthening bilateral ties are in the nature of crisis management, aimed at addressing immediate problems. Adjustments in relations have been 'tactical' and aimed at problem solving, rather than strategic and transformative. At the same time, these bilateral dealings have not had a pure zero-sum character, but have amounted to a mixed bag of rivalry and collaboration, a pattern not unlike the nineteenth-century European concert.²⁶ In considering how bilateral relationships among the great powers may be affected within a concert system, it is important to note that some sides of an Asian concert are likely to be more developed than the others, regardless of whether the system is based on a triangular model – involving the US, China and Japan – or a quadrangular model, with the addition of Russia. The Sino-Russian and the US-Japanese relationships are currently more stable than the Sino-Japanese and Sino-US relationships, while uncertainties remain as to the development of the Japan-Russia and US-Russia relationships. The uneven development of bilateral relations within a putative Asian concert is likely to cause misperceptions and suspicions among the great powers. But a four-power concert is likely to prove more stable than a three-power one. There is a problem inherent in any concert system that relies on a triangular relationship as its core element (the most frequently cited example is the so-called US-China-Japan 'strategic triangle'). In such a system, an attempt by any two sides to improve their bilateral relationship is likely to be perceived by the third party as being at its own expense. Thus, the effort by the US and China to forge a strategic partnership is perceived negatively by Japan, while the move by the US and Japan to reaffirm their bilateral alliance is alarming to China. A concert is, after all, a managed balance-of-power system rather than a security community in which states forsake war and power competitions. States are more likely to emphasise their relative gain accruing from the improvement of a particular set of bilateral relationships than the absolute gain that comes from the overall improvement in the security climate. A four-power

concert can mitigate some of these problems: for example, China and Russia can look to each other to balance the US–Japan alliance.

Managing regional conflicts

Overall, the major powers in the Asia Pacific seem more concerned with managing their bilateral problems than with developing a joint approach to regional order. But there are two regional issues that would particularly lend themselves to great-power management. The first concerns the security of the Korean Peninsula. Here, a framework focusing on great-power management has developed in the absence of viable multilateral alternatives. North-east Asia has no equivalent of ASEAN.²⁷

North-east Asia also lacks a sub-regional security forum. Proposals to create one have run into opposition from North Korea, which believes that such a framework would be used by South Korea and the US to put pressure on it. In November 1996, the US and South Korea proposed four-party talks between North and South Korea to be held with the US and China. This could be seen as an acknowledgement that the two relevant great powers, the US and China, have a 'special responsibility' (a key principle of concert) to manage the Korean situation. But this approach has not been successful. North Korea sought major preconditions for its participation. It first demanded and secured food aid from the US. Later, after the first plenary talks were held in December 1997, it insisted that the agenda of the talks must include the withdrawal of all US troops from the South. China too has been less than enthusiastic about the four-party talks. China does not need such a framework to deal with North Korea, given its close economic and military links with Pyongyang. Moreover, Beijing is concerned that the four-party talks do not undermine the existence of the North Korean regime. Thus, progress in the four-party formula has been marginal and does not support the claim that a bilateral concert approach involving the US and China could be effective in conflict management in North-east Asia.

In the meantime, the idea of a North-East Asian Security Dialogue (NEASED), involving the US, Russia, China, Japan and the two Koreas has been proposed by South Korean President Kim Dae Jung as an extension of the four-party talks.²⁸ The proposal faces several difficulties, however. If realised, such a forum would constitute a wider framework for a concert system than the four-power talks (both in the sense of the number of major powers involved and the range of issues to be covered, which go beyond just the Korean Peninsula). It could assume the role of a '*de facto* concert', since, despite the participation of the two Koreas, the four major powers would have a decisive voice in it. But obstacles to this proposal remain; while Japan and Russia (excluded from the four-party framework) have naturally supported the six-party framework, China considers this to be premature, while the US may be concerned that it would undermine its influence in North-east Asian strategic affairs.²⁹

The problem of nuclear proliferation in South Asia is the second regional security issue where great-power management might seem appropriate. Here,

however, the idea of a concert is likely to remain more theoretical than real for quite some time. Before the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests, Sino-US-Japanese relations were marked by some convergence on proliferation issues. The Clinton administration claimed success in limiting Chinese transfer of WMD to unfriendly states in the Middle East, and spared China of all but minor punishment for its transfer of nuclear and missile technology. The South Asian nuclear race poses the most serious test of this accommodation. The Clinton-Jiang summit in June 1998 produced a separate declaration on South Asian nuclear testing. It contained reference to the two countries' 'shared interest' in South Asian stability and in a 'strong global non-proliferation regime'. Moreover, as permanent members of the UN Security Council, and as 'states with important relationships with the countries of the region', the two sides 'recognize[d] ... [their] responsibility to contribute actively' to peace and security issues in South Asia. Among other things, they agreed to 'stay closely in touch' on the South Asian situation, to maintain 'close co-ordination' of policies and action in building international response to nuclear tests, and 'to continue to work closely together' to prevent a nuclear and missile race in South Asia. They also offered to 'assist, where possible, India and Pakistan to resolve peacefully' their disputes, including the Kashmir problem. The statement also mentioned a Sino-US agreement 'to prevent the export of equipment, materials or technology that could in any way assist' India and Pakistan in developing nuclear weapons or ballistic missiles, and to strengthen the national export control systems of the US and China to this end.³⁰

The Indian response to this declaration was predictably hostile. The *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) government noted the 'irony' that 'the two countries that have directly or indirectly contributed to the unabated proliferation of nuclear weapons and delivery systems in our neighbourhood are now presuming to prescribe norms for non-proliferation'. Moreover, India 'categorically reject[ed] the notion of these two countries arrogating to themselves joint or individual responsibility for the "maintenance of peace, stability and security in the region"'.³¹ It is unlikely that India will be responsive to any Sino-US initiatives on this issue. Nor is India likely to accept UN or Security Council mediation on Kashmir. It is also doubtful, despite the pledge contained in the Sino-US statement, that China will stop military cooperation with Pakistan. Moreover, Russia, which has not imposed sanctions against India and Pakistan, is unlikely to join in any such effort on proliferation management.

A concert approach that seeks to pressure India to abandon the further development of its nuclear arsenal has little chance of being effective. There is perhaps a greater prospect for managing the nuclear danger and stabilising the nuclear arms race involving India, China and Pakistan should India be recognised as a participant in, rather than target of, an Asia Pacific concert system. Indeed, the partial lifting by the US of its sanctions imposed on India and Pakistan, and the direct bilateral dialogues between the US and the BJP government (which worried Beijing) indicated Washington's limited hope in

developing a credible approach to the South-Asia nuclear situation in partnership with China and its move towards *de facto* recognition of India's nuclear status.

Thus, a concert approach will be of limited value in dealing with nuclear proliferation in South Asia. It is even less relevant to the search for a settlement of regional disputes in the South China Sea; and, indeed, there has been little effort at recent great-power meetings to deal with that issue. Additionally, a concert will not be acceptable to China as a framework for managing the Taiwan problem.

While differences in perspective and policy abound among the Asia Pacific powers, there remain certain areas of convergence. These include rejection of European-style multilateral security institutions. Both the US and China have expressed deep reservations – albeit for different reasons – about initial proposals for an Asian version of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The US feared that such an institution would undermine its bilateral alliances, while China was concerned that it would develop into an anti-China bandwagon. But underlying their initial rejections of multilateralism was a common tendency of great powers to view multilateral institutions led by weaker states as constituting an unwarranted check on their security interests and policies.

While both China and the US have been more welcoming of the ARF, Beijing opposes any ARF role in dispute-settlement or conflict resolution, while Washington sees it as a supplement rather than substitute for a balance-of-power system, underpinned by its military umbrella. Japan's attitude is shaped by and parallels the US position. Together, the attitudes of US, Japan and China towards multilateral approaches differ from those of the middle powers such as Australia and Canada, who advocate speedier development of more institutionalised mechanisms for security cooperation.

China's preference for bilateral arrangements is strictly limited, however, to bilateral modes of confidence building (as reflected in its CBM treaties with India, Russia and the Central Asian republics) and dispute settlement (in the case of the South China Sea). Beijing naturally opposes the strengthening of America's bilateral alliances. The US, for its part, prefers bilateral defence relations.

While all the four major powers of the Asia Pacific may have a shared interest in developing a concert relationship, their individual motivations differ. Russia has most to gain from a four-power relationship, which will provide it with the enhanced status and a regional role that it currently lacks. Japan, the most enthusiastic supporter of four-power talks, is evidently driven by its fear of being sidelined in a possible strategic relationship between the US and China. In the case of the US, support for a relatively small, concert-like grouping to manage security issues has been evident since the Bush administration. By openly soliciting China's help in managing Asia Pacific security issues, as was evident during the 1998 Clinton visit to China, the US may have legitimised, perhaps unwittingly, great-power primacy in

maintaining regional order. The ARF was hardly mentioned during the Sino-US summit. The US also highlighted the 'leadership' shown by China in not devaluing its currency at the outset of the Asian financial crisis. However, the importance of these pronouncements can be overstated. The US interest in seeking China's cooperation on regional security issues is an attempt to constrain Beijing's policies and pre-empt Chinese actions that would undermine US strategic objectives. This does not mean that the US would adopt solutions to regional security problems along the lines preferred by Beijing. China's help is important to the US mainly because Beijing retains the ability to undermine American approaches to several vital regional security problems. This is the extent of the US acceptance of China as a 'co-manager' of regional security issues.

Officially, China rejects the idea of a great power concert, not least because of the apparent tensions between this concept and China's 'anti-hegemony' posture as developed during the Cold War. But it also agrees that regional security cooperation through frameworks such as the ARF will not be credible or successful without prior understanding and cooperation among the major powers of the region.³² It is not surprising that Beijing has apparently agreed to 'seriously' consider four-power talks on regional security.³³ The development of an informal concert not only suits China's quest for enhanced international status, but it also reduces China's fear that ARF-style multilateral approaches could become a way for smaller powers to gang up against it.³⁴

Conclusion

Relations between the US and China have deteriorated in 1999, while those between Russia and China and Japan and Russia continue to improve. The prospects for, and contours of, an Asian concert will depend substantively on how Sino-US relations recover. But it is important to stress that the crisis in Sino-US relations further underscores the salience of great-power relationships in ensuring regional order. It could pave the way for a more realistic approach to their bilateral relationship than was the case in the aftermath of Clinton's 1998 visit to China. As things stand now, the notion has some limits:

- First, the notion of concert is meaningful in the Asia Pacific region more as a framework for moderating the rivalry between the major powers themselves than in developing a joint approach on their part to other regional issues. But the two aspects cannot always be detached from one another. Differences over the latter aspect may undermine efforts to develop a more cooperative bilateral relationship among the major powers.
- Second, if an Asian concert is to emerge, it will not resemble the classic nineteenth-century European variety. Despite the recent proposals by Japan, the best prospects for the regulation of great-power competition in Asia are through cross-cutting bilateral channels, with occasional resort to *ad hoc* multilateral consultations. Some of these bilateral relationships may

complement each other, while others would be competitive. Thus, the notion of a concert, if it is to be applicable to the Asia Pacific region at all, has to be seen at best as a set of overlapping bilateral relationships that reduce tensions in great-power relations. This, in turn, may create a greater possibility for convergent approaches by the great powers in dealing with other specific regional conflicts.

- Third, a concert approach is likely to be more relevant in managing security issues in North-east Asia than in South-east or South Asia. South-east Asian issues are less central to great-power relations and will continue to be managed through existing frameworks such as ASEAN. In South Asia, a concert approach involving the US, China and Japan may produce declaratory commitments, and some complementary parallel measures. But a collective great-power response will not work because it will not recognise India as a member of the great-power club.

Given the fact that the more inclusive multilateral security institutions in the Asia Pacific are likely to remain weak and ineffectual at least for the foreseeable future, the major powers in the region are unlikely to forsake some type of balancing and coordinating behaviour outside of the wider multilateral context. China, despite its declared opposition to the idea of concert, is quite amenable to concert-based multilateralism. The US has supported *ad hoc* concert-based solutions to specific regional security issues. Japan advocates a concert-like consultative mechanism. Russia will be interested in any and all of these ideas if invited to participate.

In this context, it is important to consider how an Asian concert might affect the ARF. Conventional balance-of-power thinking, which recognises the primacy of great-power interactions, suggests that a concert will marginalise the ASEAN-led ARF. But this may not necessarily be the case. As we have seen, an Asian concert is likely to prove better at managing great-power bilateral relationships and in addressing problems in North-east Asia. In addressing other regional disputes not involving the great powers, including those in South-east Asia, the confidence-building process undertaken by the ARF, along with existing sub-regional mechanisms such as ASEAN, will be of continuing value. The weaker states, as noted earlier, will be suspicious of a great-power concert, but will accept it so long as it does not develop into a formal mechanism imposing its collective power over the rest of the region. Moreover, the ARF is more valuable as a forum for confidence-building and the development of regional norms, such as non-interference, non-use of force, and pacific settlement of disputes which will improve the overall security climate in the Asia Pacific region. A modern Asian concert is likely to be based on the same set of norms that underpin the ARF, and it may prove more effective in crisis-management and preventive diplomacy.

While a concert system involving a formal managerial role by the great powers 'over and above' the ARF is unacceptable to the region's lesser powers,

this does not negate a somewhat different possibility of a concert that exists 'side by side' with the ARF and focuses on the management of great-power relations. To this end, some of the principles of concert diplomacy – such as a commitment by all the major powers to avoid ideology-based foreign policy postures, to renounce war and territorial expansion, and to engage in regular consultations on security problems – should be especially helpful. An Asian concert founded on such principles may not only contribute to conflict reduction in North-east Asia, but may also create a more positive climate for the security and stability of Asia as a whole in the twenty-first century.³⁵

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Notes

¹ Edward Neilan, 'Four-Way Talks on Asian Security More than a Pipe Dream', *Jakarta Post*, 24 April 1998. Hashimoto told reporters that while the 'idea is still not a concrete one such a security summit would be a natural development', and suggested that the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum gatherings would provide 'the most suitable occasions for such a meeting'. The Japanese idea assumes significance when viewed against the backdrop of the 1998 annual report of its foreign ministry, released on 24 April 1998. (See: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/1998>). Entitled 'Japan's Diplomacy Towards the 21st Century', the report noted that during the previous year, 'the four major countries of the region – Japan, the United States, China and Russia, were engaged in diplomatic activity more positively than before': see 'Japan Seeks Closer Big Power Ties', *The Straits Times*, 25 April 1998, p. 23.

² 'Japan, China, US To Hold Security Talks', *The Straits Times*, 5 July 1998, p. 21.

³ On the European Concert, see Richard Langhorne, *The Collapse of the Concert of Europe: International Politics, 1890–1914* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981); F.R. Bridge and Roger Bullen, *The Great Powers and the European States System 1815–1914* (London: Longmans, 1980); Paul Schroeder, 'The 19th-Century International System: Changes in the Structure', *World Politics*, vol. 34, October 1986, pp. 1–25; Robert Jervis, 'From Balance to Concert: A Study of Security Cooperation', in Kenneth A. Oye (ed.), *Cooperation Under Anarchy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); Charles A. Kupchan and Clifford A. Kupchan, 'Concerts, Collective Security and the Future of Europe', *International Security*, vol. 16, no. 1, Summer 1991, pp. 114–61.

⁴ Richard Elrod, 'The Concert of Europe: A Fresh Look at an International System', *World Politics*, vol. 28, January 1976, pp. 163–66.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 168.

⁶ Benjamin Miller, 'A "New World Order": From Balancing to Hegemony, Concert or Collective Security', *International Interactions*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1992, p. 9.

⁷ John Mearsheimer, 'The False Promise of International Institutions', *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 3, Winter 1994/95, pp. 35–36.

⁸ Richard Elrod, 'The Concert of Europe', p. 164.

⁹ Barry Buzan and Gerald Segal, 'Rethinking East Asian Security', *Survival*, vol. 36, no. 2, Summer 1994, p. 16.

¹⁰ *The Bangkok Post*, 27 July 1993, p. 6.

¹¹ Patrick Morgan, 'Multilateralism and Security: Prospects in Europe', in John Gerard Ruggie (ed.), *Multilateralism Matters: The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 335.

¹² Philip Zelikow, 'The New Concert of Europe', *Survival*, vol. 34, no. 2, Summer 1992, p. 26.

¹³ Richard Rosecrance, 'A New Concert of Powers', *Dialogue*, no. 101, 3/1993 (reprinted from *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 71, no. 2, Spring 1992).

¹⁴ John Mearsheimer, 'The False Promise of International Institutions', p. 35.

¹⁵ Interview with Lee Kuan Yew, *Newsweek*, reprinted in *The Straits Times*, 16 June 1998, p. 33.

¹⁶ Author interviews with Chinese officials and academics: 'Engaging China Through the ARF: Expectations Versus the Evidence, A Research Trip Report', unpublished research report, 10 October 1998; see also Banning Garrett and Bonnie Glasser, 'Beijing's Views on Multilateral Security in the Asia-Pacific Region', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 16, no. 1, June 1994, p. 18.

¹⁷ 'The Asia-Pacific Region: Cockpit for Superpower Rivalry', *The World Today*, vol. 43, nos 8–9, August/September 1987, pp. 155–59.

¹⁸ On the origins and evolution of the ARF, see Amitav Acharya, 'Making Multilateralism Work: The ASEAN Regional Forum and Security in the Asia Pacific', in *Multilateral Activities in Southeast Asia*, (Washington DC: National Defense University Press,

1996); Michael Leifer, *The ASEAN Regional Forum*, Adelphi Paper no. 302 (London: Oxford University Press for the IISS, 1996).

¹⁹ Susanne Feske, 'The US–Japan Security Alliance: Out of Date or Highly Fashionable', *Journal of East Asian Affairs*, vol. 9, no. 2, Summer/Fall 1997, p. 436.

²⁰ Richard Elrod, 'The Concert of Europe', p. 169.

²¹ Benjamin Miller, 'A New World Order', p. 10.

²² *East Asian Strategic Review 1997–1998* (Tokyo: National Institute for Defence Studies, 1998), p. 17.

²³ For an analysis of the Sino-Russian (Shanghai Agreement) and Sino-India confidence-building efforts, see Amitav Acharya, *The ASEAN Regional Forum: Confidence-Building* (Ottawa: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 1997).

²⁴ 'Japan-Russia Summit Achieves Better-Than-Expected Results', Foreign Press Center, Japan, 10 November 1997 (see: <http://www.nttl.co.jp/fpc/e/shiryo/jb/j9742.html>), p. 1.

²⁵ 'Kuriles Quarrel: How Japan and Russia can resolve their thorniest dispute', *Asiaweek*, 27 November 1998 (see: <http://www.pathfinder.com/asiaweek/98/1127/ed1.html>), p. 1.

²⁶ Benjamin Miller, 'A New World Order', p. 10.

²⁷ Institutionally based in South-east Asia, and without North Korean membership (which the US has opposed), the ARF can only make declarations about North-east Asian affairs.

²⁸ As such it will be different from the Track-II level dialogues that had taken place since 1993 under the auspices of the North-East Asia Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD), which is composed of Japan, the US, Russia, China and South Korea, organised by the University of California, San Diego since 1993. After appearing in the first session,

North Korea has refused to take part in it. Currently, North Korea participates only in the North Pacific Working Group of the Track-II Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP).

²⁹ Ralph Cossa, 'Northeast Asia Security Forum: Is Such a Gathering Possible?', *Pacnet* #19, 14 May 1999, p. 1

³⁰ 'Sino-US Presidential Joint Statement on South Asia', *The China Daily*, 28 June 1998.

³¹ 'India Slams Call Not to Deploy N-arms', *The Straits Times*, 29 June 1998, p. 13.

³² Banning Garrett and Bonnie Glaser, 'Multilateral Security in the Asia-Pacific Region and its Impact on Chinese Interests: Views from Beijing', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 16, no. 1, June 1994, p. 18.

³³ 'Japan Seeks Closer Big Power Ties' *The Straits Times*, 25 April 1998, p. 23.

China's Vice-President, Hu Jintao, is also credited in that article with the statement that 'Four-way talks have already been on the table at private levels. We are now considering such talks at government levels'.

³⁴ On the importance of status to China, see Jianwei Wang, 'Coping with China as a Rising Power', in James Shinn (ed.), *Weaving the Net: Conditional Engagement of China* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1996), p. 17. Wang argues for making China a member of the G-7 (now G-8) so as to convey 'a signal to Beijing that Western countries treat China as an important and equal partner'.

³⁵ Amitav Acharya, 'A Concert of Powers in the Asia Pacific', in Derek Da Cunha (ed.), *The Evolving Pacific Power Balance* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1996), pp. 63–69.